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New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 33 *(continued)*

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/554 and Corr.1)

Draft resolution (A/53/L.38)

Mr. Kolby (Norway): The broad participation in the Ministerial Meeting of the group of New or Restored Democracies here in the United Nations two months ago was a clear illustration of the fact that democracy is taking hold all over the world. As the twentieth century draws to a close, democracy is emerging as a clear winner on the global scene.

Democracy has proved to be the choice of free people all over the world. The reason is obvious. Democracy gives every person a voice, it gives everyone the freedom to utilize his or her full potential, and it enables individuals and societies to harness the very best of their resources. Democratic governance is conflict-solving and war-hindering. It is by far the best means for political stability and sustained economic progress.

The challenge before us now is to strengthen and renew the forces of democracy so that they can take root in every sector and every level of society — how to underpin democracy and let the will of the people set the course for the future. The group of New or Restored Democracies has taken on an important role in this endeavour.

In a few weeks we will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. On 20 November, the Third Committee adopted the Declaration on human rights defenders, which highlights the role of civil society in pursuing universal implementation of human rights. This is a basic building block for democracy.

Democracy is more than genuine and regular elections. It is about the rule of law, political accountability, pluralism and human rights. Although democracies come in many shapes and forms, they are all built on certain basic principles. Norway very much welcomes the work of the group of New or Restored Democracies in bringing about a common understanding of the minimum conditions for democracy. The guidelines adopted at the Bucharest Conference last year are most important to this end.

Human rights cover civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Combating poverty is one of the most important human rights issues facing us. Human rights constitute an integrated and mutually reinforcing whole, and democracy means respecting people's rights — all of them.

98-86494 (E)

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An important theme at the September meeting of the group of New or Restored Democracies was indeed the close interrelationship between democracy and development. Many speakers, including the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Knut Vollebaek, identified poverty as the single most formidable threat to democracy. Economic opportunities and social progress are essential for democracies to flourish. Poverty is undermining democracy and hampering democratic developments.

We are, however, presently witnessing a widening gap — among nations as well as within them — between those who live in affluence and those who do not have sufficient means of subsistence. The global financial crisis has aggravated the poverty problem by forcing people out of work, families out of their homes and children out of their schools. Today, it is more important than ever to provide a social security net for those in need while vigorously fighting the underlying causes of poverty with every means available.

Unless we are able to bridge the poverty gap, misery and disillusion will prevail, and democracy will grow on thin soil. Words alone will not suffice. Increased development assistance is clearly needed.

The peaceful resolution of conflicts is at the very core of democracy. The building of democracy is a long-term process, particularly in societies where conflicts traditionally have been solved by violent means. In post-conflict situations, particular attention must therefore be given to the development of democratic institutions and of a vibrant civil society which will further promote democracy and guard against undemocratic counter-currents.

The report by the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, and the subsequent discussion here at the United Nations, clearly illustrated that democratic governance is essential for political stability and economic development. The African nations themselves have the primary responsibility for defining and implementing solutions to the many problems ravaging their continent, thereby laying the foundations for long-term development. But assistance from the international community must be available. Norway remains committed to contributing to these efforts.

Democracies are never completed. They need constant renewal and adaptation to new circumstances. Strengthening democracy requires dedication and patience, and better cooperation among the different actors involved is essential. Norway will work for even closer cooperation with the United Nations and groups like that of New or Restored Democracies when next year we take over the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Norway is strongly committed to democracy. We believe in building democracy and democratic rule within and among States. Democracy does not come by itself. Democratic values must be actively pursued. Standing together, we may turn global democracy into reality.

Mr. Selim (Bangladesh): Bangladesh attaches particular importance to the agenda item entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies". We believe that the United Nations system can play an effective role in the global democratization process. Millions of people worldwide who have either restored democracy in their countries or started the democratization process are looking to this world body for support and for the cooperation of the international community in their efforts towards democratization, good governance and development.

We commend the Secretary-General for his report (A/53/554), which gives us a comprehensive overview of the activities and ideas of the United Nations in this regard. We also thank the Government of Romania for organizing the Third International Conference of the New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development. Such conferences serve a very important purpose: to reaffirm the effectiveness of democracy as a system of government. They also offer the opportunity formally and informally to exchange experiences and learn from such exchanges.

The changes that have taken place in the international arena provide us with a powerful impetus for the global process of democratization. The first International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in the Philippines in 1988, encouraged many countries of the world, in realization of their people's aspirations, to join the family of States that had been pursuing freedom, justice and democracy for many decades or in some cases centuries.

The Declaration and Plan of Action endorsed by the Second International Conference, in Nicaragua in 1994, urged the United Nations system to have an active

involvement in the process. The final document of the Third International Conference, held in Bucharest in September 1997, underlined the United Nations role in helping countries meet their challenges. I am confident that our discussion today will assist our world body in defining further its role in the promotion of global democracy.

In the present international setting, it is only democratization which can help States effectively address many problems and tensions of today's world. It can help States in formulating policies for the next century. Democracy and development are inseparable. In the context of the present-day world, on the road to development and democratization, the poor countries of the world depend to a great extent on the cooperation of the developed economies which are also developed democracies. In many instances, the developing countries are given conditions for development cooperation which most often are irrelevant and inappropriate. Such conditionalities, when attached to cooperation packages, negatively affect the recipients and do not promote the objective of cooperation because different democracies have different characters stemming from specific political, social and economic circumstances, cultures and traditions. We are happy to note that the Secretary-General has highlighted this fact in his report.

The Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, since assuming office following a free and fair election in June 1996, has been trying to reinforce democracy and promote good governance. With a view to promoting social cohesion and integration and ensuring the well-being and participation of the people, Bangladesh is seriously engaged in peace and the delegation of power to the local bodies. In this context, I have the privilege to say that the Government of Sheikh Hasina, through the Bangladesh National Parliament, is in the process of passing bills which would introduce decentralization of the central Government, resulting in the transfer of more powers to the democratically elected local authority bodies, such as union, thana/upazila and district councils.

The commitment of Bangladesh to democracy and the rule of law prompted us to accord priority to human rights. I am happy to inform this body that Bangladesh is in the process of setting up an independent national human rights commission with the objective of taking human rights issues to the grass-roots level to increase awareness among our people of their rights. Bangladesh believes in the centrality of the right to development within the human rights regime. We are embarked on a comprehensive programme of reform and deregulation.

Social development has remained a main focus of all development strategies. Education, health care and women's involvement within the broad framework of human development continues to receive priority attention. The rights of women and children are being focused upon. The role and involvement of civil society in our development and democratization efforts, particularly in social sectors, have been remarkable.

We strongly recommend that the Organization improve its capacity to respond effectively to the requests of Member States for support for their democratization efforts. While doing so, we also recognize the responsibility of the respective countries for ensuring observance of important principles such as human rights, individual freedom, peace, justice, equality, the rule of law, pluralism, development and better standards of living. In this respect, we must bear in mind the fact that democracy functions best under the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural system and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. However, we must at the same time recognize that the essential values of democracy, such as free and transparent elections, development and peace, are not undermined.

My delegation is happy to note that the follow-up process of the implementation of the recommendations adopted at Bucharest has initiated projects such as a Web site, a database, an inventory and the democracy forum. We are also happy to note that the Fourth International Conference will take place in Benin. We are confident that the Fourth International Conference will be able to mobilize the wisdom and sagacity of African leaders to speed up and broaden the process of democratization throughout the world.

Mr. Diagne (Senegal)(*interpretation from French*): The Senegalese delegation is pleased to join in support of the draft resolution on support of the United Nations system for the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. Debate on this item at this session of the General Assembly is, in my delegation's view, both a sign of the times and a reaffirmation of a historical truth — the universal need for democracy.

Over the years, the march of peoples towards liberty and democracy has accelerated, highlighting the natural right of human beings to enjoy freedom and manage their life democratically. The recent history of new or restored democracies shows us that a political system will always

fail if it overlooks the obvious principle that the power and legitimacy of Governments must always be founded on the freely expressed consent of its citizens. Above and beyond principles, documents and institutions, we consider that the democratic system is primarily a state of mind, an area for the flourishing of humankind in which the freedom of one individual ends where the freedom of another begins. These, in the view of my delegation, are some of the parameters that must be respected for the establishment of democratic culture and the consolidation of new or restored democracies.

It is right and timely to recall here that in order for democratic regimes to last, particularly in the developing world or in countries in transition, a viable economic and social foundation conducive to the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights is required. In short, the right to development is an inextricable complement of civil and political rights. Therefore, democratization must be supported through a comprehensive approach incorporating political, institutional, economic and social dimensions because democracy, peace and development complement each other and contribute equally to the well-being and progress of peoples.

In this regard, my delegation has noted with interest the activities undertaken by the United Nations in support of efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. The Secretary-General's report contains interesting points, particularly with regard to technical cooperation, support for good governance, the reform of the public sector, the strengthening of the legal system and the fight against corruption.

We also hope that more sustained attention will be given to cooperation between traditional democracies and new or restored democracies, particularly with regard to exchanges of experience on ways and means of improving our systems.

Since democracy is an ideal, it has taken no final form, but is always moving towards an ideal. Democracy is, in short, a work always in progress, built in accordance with the histories and cultures of peoples.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the Romanian Government for its meaningful contribution to promoting this subject by hosting, in September 1997, the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Bucharest. I am convinced that the Fourth Conference, which is to be held in Benin, on African soil, will provide an opportunity to extend even further what was accomplished in Bucharest.

Mr. Yacoubou (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): The delegation of Benin congratulates the Secretary-General on the issuance of his report (A/53/554) entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies", which contains extremely useful information for our current debate.

Democracy is a model for economic and social development. It is a valuable asset in the common heritage of humankind, one that the international community has the responsibility and the duty to preserve always and everywhere. It is for this reason that my delegation welcomes all the initiatives that the Secretary-General, as well as United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, have undertaken throughout the world in support of efforts made by Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.

I would like most earnestly to thank all the institutions of the United Nations system that have organized training programmes, seminars and other programmes throughout the world to promote a democratic culture in countries that have so requested.

Democracy is a demanding and costly human endeavour, but it is very profitable in terms of social peace and the well-being of peoples. Indeed, the exercise of democracy allows us to establish lasting concord and social peace among the citizens of all countries, who furthermore enjoy free expression and benefit from equality before the law. It allows for the full development of the human being by eliminating most of the obstacles that can be seen in other systems of Government.

In order to be truly efficient and to assure the full development of the individual, democracy needs to be based on certain fundamental criteria, of which the most important, in the view of my delegation, are literacy and an awareness by the people of their rights and duties. In fact, we cannot really conceive of the flourishing of a democracy with an entirely illiterate and uneducated population, or where it is difficult for citizens to express opinions on the various social plans presented to them by candidates for elective office.

It is for this reason that my country, in its programme of democratization, also attaches great importance to the training aspect and, above all, to that

of literacy for those strata of the population that have not had access to schooling.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank Benin's development partners that are acting in the area of education in general and literacy in particular.

I would also like to take this opportunity to appeal to the international community to provide more help to my country in achieving its objective of primary education for all Beninese children in the near future, with the goal of strengthening lasting democracy in the country. Furthermore, my delegation remains convinced that simply meeting the requirement of periodic elections is not enough, and could not be at all decisive in establishing and guaranteeing lasting democracy in a given country, especially in a developing one.

This is where the responsibility of the international community comes into play, in its efforts to support those made by young democracies to establish a lasting democracy by developing a sustainable economy that allows each and every citizen to have the minimum necessary for a decent life.

Indeed, most young democracies develop in a fragile economic environment; but each and every one of us knows that a minimum of economic development — a minimum of material basics — is an essential prerequisite for the establishment of a genuine democratic culture.

Periodic elections, the foundation of democracy, are costly and absorb a high percentage of the small budgets of certain young democracies. This means constant resort to assistance from the international community for those countries going through the difficult stages of consolidating the democratic experience.

My country, Benin, which since 1990 has committed itself to this lofty democratic experience, is striving to establish a democratic culture among all strata of society. So it is that in the framework of good governance the Beninese Government has undertaken a vast programme to fight corruption, a phenomenon whose harmful and perverse effects on the economy of a country are well known. The multiplicity of sources of information has been encouraged by the public authorities, which means that the State authorities no longer have a monopoly on information. Moreover, in order for each citizen to participate better in the management of public affairs, the Government has initiated a reform of the territorial administration reform aimed at decentralization. This reform, which will allow for the grass-roots election of local officials, who will naturally be accountable to those who elect them, is now at an advanced stage.

Once again, the Government of Benin, through me, would like to extend its sincere thanks to our development partners that support this project, which my delegation believes to be very important in the inculcation of democratic culture in Benin.

My delegation would like to thank and commend the international community for the results achieved during the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest from 2 to 4 September 1997, and above all for the unanimous support given to the candidacy of Benin to host the Fourth Conference, which will take place in Cotonou in the year 2000. Furthermore, we are pleased to inform the Assembly of the decision taken by our sister delegation of Cameroon to join the many sponsors of draft resolution A/53/L.38, which we hope will be adopted without a vote, as have been such resolutions in the past.

The Government of my country has already begun preparations for the efficient holding of this Conference on African soil for the first time. This is a sign of solidarity with and benevolence towards the young African democracies.

In conclusion, I wish to pay a hearty tribute to the permanent mission of Romania for the friendly and generous cooperation it has been showing my delegation in the context of these preparations. As always, Benin is counting on the international community, the Secretary-General, the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the community of development partners for their valuable contributions to making the Conference a success that will do credit to the entire international community in its efforts to consolidate democratic culture throughout the world.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*interpretation from French*): The 1990s were marked in Africa by such a strong movement towards liberal democracy that elections set the pace of political life on the continent. Presidential elections were held just a few days ago in my country, Burkina Faso. In the Central African Republic, votes are being counted in the legislative elections that took place yesterday. Next month, in December, there will also be presidential elections in Gabon and Guinea. In 1999, at least four major elections are scheduled in Algeria, South

Africa, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria. In other words, pluralistic democracy has become an essential imperative.

Much remains to be done, however. One need only recall that 20 years ago, in the 1970s, during a period of extreme militarization among regimes in Africa, only two States in West Africa — Senegal and Burkina Faso, then called Upper Volta — were practising multipartism, doing so at great risk. It was not until 1990 that most African Governments — admonished by the West, which was then linking assistance to government democratization — began to take their medicine. Today, most of these regimes have become democratic, but it will surprise no one that this kind of achievement is never set in stone.

Indeed, we all know that democratization is a work in progress, given the great resistance and numerous impediments to its flourishing. For instance, habits acquired in the exclusive wielding of power do not readily accept the transfer of power, which is the keystone of democracy. There are also sociological burdens. There is even the philosophical argument about whether representative democracy is compatible with African culture. Hence the need to support the efforts of Governments to encourage and strengthen these new democracies.

The report of the Secretary-General before us, which we welcome for its clarity and interesting proposals, is a valuable contribution in this respect. No democracy can flourish in disorder and social confrontation. The United Nations took this into account by ensuring that the peace has been kept in some Member States in order to allow elections to be held without hindrance. The United Nations missions in Haiti and Bosnia and Herzegovina allowed the smooth holding of elections there. Similarly, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara is facilitating the organization of a self-determination referendum in that country. The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic is giving technical support and advice to the organization of elections in that country.

The United Nations system has also done a great deal to raise awareness, particularly by mobilizing civil society and encouraging its participation in democratic practices. To that end, United Nations information centres have played and continue to play a key role in educating citizens and the media. United Nations electoral assistance is also visible and highly appreciated. The Secretary-General's report indicates that there have been 140 requests for electoral assistance since 1989.

The commitment of the United Nations system to helping Governments promote and consolidate new democracies speaks for itself. We would, however, like to emphasize two important aspects that we believe should receive the utmost attention of the international community.

First, we believe it essential that the United Nations increase its assistance in the area of human rights, because true democracy requires strict respect for such rights. The denial of human rights, the essential pillars of society, leads to the denial of democracy. The person who does not respect human rights cannot understood the very validity of democracy. United Nations action in this area must be focused on reinforcing democratic culture. The system's specialized institutions can play a decisive role in this regard.

Secondly, we feel that it is urgent for the United Nations to draw the international community's attention to the importance of the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, scheduled for the year 2000. After the earlier three Conferences, which had a positive effect on the world political order because of the greater consideration accorded to the requirements of democracy, this Conference will be of paramount importance because it will allow us to summarize all the efforts made to date to safeguard and consolidate new democracies and to define new projects. Africa is grateful to the United Nations for the fact that it will be convened on African soil.

Benin, the venue of choice, is an appropriate symbol because that brotherly country, having abjured Marxism-Leninism, became a pioneer democracy by opening a series of national conferences to serve as the inspiration for most African States in their work to democratize their political systems. I therefore urge the General Assembly to give its full support to draft resolution A/53/L.38.

Mr. Kastrup (Germany): My delegation fully associates itself with the statement just delivered by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. In particular, Germany fully subscribes to the European Union's commitment to the worldwide promotion and consolidation of new or restored democracies and supports substantially the pro-democracy activities outlined in that statement.

Germany's keen interest in the issue of promoting and consolidating democracies goes well beyond moral and material support to third countries. Indeed, the fall of

the Berlin Wall nine years ago placed us among those for whom the restoration of democracy is a day-to-day challenge in our own country.

The peaceful revolution which took place in East Germany will always be a source of pride for us Germans. It was brought about in a non-violent manner by the people through the continuous public expression of their will.

German unification has to be understood as part of a development towards unifying Europe. Both processes are based on the firm belief in and unconditional respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. But building and preserving these foundations of German and European unity is not an easy task. We know that the advent of democracy often creates high-flying expectations that are not easy to fulfil.

Looking at the situation in the new federal states, we know that not only reconstructing the economy and the institutions, but also developing a stronger sense of belonging together will be a lengthy process. The new German Government will devise a promotion strategy for the new federal states. Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has declared that he will personally be involved in reconstructing the new federal states. Paying tribute to what East Germans have gone through and what they have accomplished, Chancellor Schröder underlined,

> "The civic courage, creativity and flair for innovation of East Germans can and should teach many in the West a thing or two. People in the new *Länder* have no small experience of both the myths and the realities of politics. They have a right to know what the problems are and what solutions there are — and then to demand that we lose no time in tackling them."

Sharing with the Assembly some of our German experiences by no means implies that for Germany the promotion and consolidation of democracy has become a matter of mere introspection. On the contrary, our own experiences allow us to have a better understanding of the material, institutional and psychological problems involved.

Our involvement with the movement of new or restored democracies and our attendance at the International Conferences and the recent Ministerial Meeting organized to follow up on them; our support for democratization programmes led by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union; our own national democratization programme; and, not least, our support for the draft resolution sponsored by Romania are living proof of our firm and substantial commitment to the cause of promoting and consolidating democracies.

In conclusion, let me share with the Assembly one aspect of our national experience that seems to me to be of particular relevance. Democracy is no quick fix to the unresolved problems of an economic, social, political or cultural order. But it is the only remedy likely to produce lasting solutions, the only way to ensure that problems which may arise in the future will be dealt with fairly and equitably and the best way to inspire a new common sense of purpose in a people that history had torn apart.

In this spirit, Germany is interested in continuing its cooperation with the new and restored democracies. While we thank Romania in its capacity as the acting Chair of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, our best wishes go to the Government of Benin in its intention of carrying on the torch.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his concise and comprehensive report on United Nations support for the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. In his report, I believe that the Secretary-General has succeeded in giving a meaningful answer to our call for a report that will enable the United Nations to respond effectively and in an integrated manner to the requests of Member States for assistance in the field of democratization.

The Secretary-General's report is not only an excellent record of the collective efforts of the many new and restored democracies to strengthen their democratic Governments, but is a testimony to the fact that democratization is an issue that touches on all aspects of governance and nation-building and that democracy is not an abstract or ambiguous concept, but a practical reality and an essential component of a just and fair national leadership.

This year the Philippines celebrated the centennial of its first taste of democracy as a nation State. In 1898, the Philippines fought for and won its independence and established a democratic Government. But external and internal forces that were far from democratic ensured that our first experience as a democratic State would be a difficult one.

A dozen years ago, in 1986, we, as a nation and as a people, in a single and unified voice, through the peaceful struggle of our "people power" revolution, established the democracy we enjoy today. In 1988, two years after we had established democracy in the Philippines, we organized, with a handful of other States, the first meeting of new or restored democracies. That first meeting not only served as a venue for expressing our high hopes and expectations for the spread of democracy throughout the world, but also helped strengthen and reinforce our own fragile and hard-won democracy.

Also during this year of the centennial of Philippine independence, the Filipino people reinforced their commitment to democracy by selecting national leaders through popular elections. Reinforcing our democratic ideals at this time is made even more significant because of the fact that today, we in our region continue to recover from economic problems of crisis proportions. History has shown that crisis can sometimes give rise to a strong temptation to compromise democratic principles. We will not give in to this apparent dictate of history.

With each day that passes, the international consensus that democratization is the way to the future increases just as our numbers in the movement of new or restored democracies have continued to expand. The dreams and aspirations of our first conference have been turning into reality. Our numbers continue to swell just as our collective commitment to democracy continues to grow.

The involvement of other national and international players has also been growing. The process of democratization should involve a partnership between Government, the private sector and civil society. The participation of all these sectors has been growing, and we look forward to even more vigorous exchanges and interactions between and among these partners when we meet once again — this time in Africa, in Cotonou, Benin — for our Fourth Conference, in the year 2000. We also wish to express our appreciation to the Government of Romania for hosting the Third Conference, as well as to the Permanent Mission of Romania in New York for the excellent work it has accomplished and is continuing to accomplish in this regard.

It has been said in many ways and in various languages by various peoples that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom and liberty. We should not take our democratic gains for granted. The draft resolution which is before us today, introduced by Romania, and the report of the Secretary-General are not only direct results of our call for an enhanced and meaningful relationship between the new or restored democracies and the United Nations, but also represent our collective political commitment to promoting the ideals of our movement and the basic tenets of democracy.

We must therefore continue to work as individual nations and as an Organization to strengthen our democratic gains. We must continue our dialogue and deal with specific issues and problems that relate to good and democratic governance.

In this regard, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, I am privileged to announce that the Philippines, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and other international organizations dedicated to the ideals of good government, will host next year the World Conference on Governance. The Conference, to be held in Manila from 31 May to 4 June 1999, will bring together a good balance of people of influence from public service, academe, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, international agencies and organizations and civil society from all over the world to address specific issues relating to government and governance.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite members to send representatives to this World Conference on Governance. We believe that this Conference will contribute to making the Fourth Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Benin even more meaningful and bring us closer to bringing to fruition the proposal to hold a summit of new or restored democracies at the start of the new millennium.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): The process of democratization is one of the most important factors determining the political life of the international community, especially in the last two decades, since democracy is recognized as a normative goal for the entire world.

In view of globalization, which is another main feature of the present times, the achievement of that goal seems to be much more possible as the world democratization experience can be broadly used by new and restored democracies facing similar specific problems in order to better address common transition difficulties.

The role of the United Nations in assisting these countries to consolidate their efforts in the field of democratization should not be underestimated. Therefore,

my delegation welcomes with satisfaction the Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/53/554, which outlines the series of activities undertaken by the United Nations system in the field of democratization and governance.

For its part, Ukraine always stands ready to cooperate with other countries, the appropriate United Nations bodies and specialized agencies in implementation of the recommendations of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, held in Bucharest in September 1997.

A recent example of such fruitful cooperation between my country and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), noted in the Secretary-General's report, was the regional conference on the theme "Human rights for human development" held in the city of Yalta, Ukraine, in September this year. This international event was organized as a joint effort by the Government of Ukraine and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and it brought together delegations from nearly 30 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The importance of the Yalta conference lies in the recommendations formulated on the protection of human rights, and in particular on institutional development and exchange of experience in the field of human rights, as well as its contribution to establishing the priorities for action at the national level.

My country considers that the ultimate objective of the process of democratization should be achieving political, economic and social stability and order based on the universal principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international documents.

Having embarked on the road of democratic transformation over seven years ago, Ukraine has demonstrated clearly its steady aspiration to become a State in which every person's potential is realized to the fullest and where every individual can see his or her own place in the processes of building the Ukrainian State. The parliamentary elections in my country last spring confirmed that the majority of Ukrainian people continue to support the course to a democratic, socially oriented and law-governed State.

The basic principles of the new Constitution of Ukraine, adopted two years ago, were designed to further promote and protect democracy and make market economy transformations irreversible. The important steps in the direction of the further democratization of society were the setting up of two significant national instruments. The Parliamentary Human Rights Plenipotentiary, or Ombudsman, was recently appointed to provide parliamentary control over the implementation of human rights and freedoms in the country; and the independent Constitutional Court was established to guarantee the constitutional observance of human rights in Ukraine.

Ukraine's membership in the Council of Europe and its accession to the European Convention on Human Rights are further vivid testimony of its movement towards democratization in all spheres of social life. The ongoing reform of the Ukrainian legal system to bring it into compliance with the existing international standards, including, *inter alia*, those of the Council of Europe, is in keeping with the spirit of the Bucharest Conference.

My delegation believes that the follow-up mechanism set up by the Bucharest Conference should help the interested countries in collecting and exchanging experience and best practices to promote the democratization process. We consider this mechanism to be a very important international tool for the implementation of the Bucharest Conference's recommendations, to which Ukraine is committed.

In this respect, we welcomed the convening of the Ministerial Meeting of States participants in the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which was held in New York on 22 September this year within the framework of the current General Assembly session. We think that that was a good opportunity to examine and discuss the progress achieved in the field of democratization and a practical contribution to the follow-up process. It was also an opportune occasion to acknowledge the instrumental role of the Government of Romania in this endeavour.

In conclusion, I would like to express my delegation's satisfaction that a Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies will be convened in the year 2000 on the African continent. We appreciate the gracious offer of the Government of Benin to host that forum. We are prepared to work actively in the preparatory process in order to ensure its success.

Mr. Squadron (United States of America): The national interests of every nation are best served by the growth of democracy globally. Democracy favours and fosters the rule of law, respect for human rights, political

and social stability and economic growth. But democratization requires a long struggle and constant dedication to the goal. We commend the Romanian initiatives of introducing the draft resolution under consideration today and of hosting the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies last year. As Secretary of State Albright noted in a speech before the Organization of African Unity, democracy is always and everywhere a work in progress.

Any democracy-promotion policy must place a great emphasis on multi-party elections. Countries emerging from conflict or repressive pasts typically face urgent development tasks in all sectors: social, economic and political. While social and economic development occurs through a long-term process, development in the political sector must be more immediate. Elections are the necessary early milestones of political development, the chief means by which the electorate can express its will. The United States supports United Nations electoral assistance projects around the world. The speed with which the Electoral Assistance Division has responded to needs in Nigeria most recently is admirable.

After citizens in newly democratic States participate in elections, they too often have the impression that democratic development stalls or ends. No one should expect that elections are an instant fix for post-conflict societies or fragile democracies, however essential an element of democratization elections are. On occasion, free and fair elections do produce illiberal regimes opposed to the continuation of the very system that brought them to power. Genuine democracy is not proved by a single election, but requires a number of factors, including a succession of free and fair elections, the existence of a civil society, an informed citizenry, an independent judiciary, a free press, a loyal opposition, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

These last two principles — respect for human rights and the rule of law — are always interrelated and should always be a major goal of any policy supporting democracy. A strengthened rule of law is essential to safeguarding basic freedoms, protecting ethnic and religious minorities, promoting Government accountability and providing social stability and the legal framework necessary for economic development.

Finally, we must always vigilantly reject the discredited thesis that for the citizens of certain nations, democracy and human rights exist only in a distant future or do not suit their culture. All the citizens of the world deserve to have their lives governed by these immutable principles of respect for human rights and the rule of law and democracy in practice.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Italy fully subscribes to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union on this item. However, I would like to make some additional comments on a few issues to which we attach special importance.

The consolidation of the new and, by definition, fragile democratic systems is one of the greatest, most important challenges of our time. The developments of the last few years demonstrate beyond any doubt that democratic Governments based on the participation of all citizens in political life are not only the system that best responds to the natural aspirations of all men and women to freedom, but also the most efficient and rational form of Government.

It is therefore crucial that the United Nations assist Member States in this process by helping them develop more equitable and effective government of their people and strengthen their civil society. Indeed, the United Nations is increasingly asked to initiate programmes and activities that promote democratic culture in helping negotiate and implement the settlement of conflict and subsequent efforts to assist a country in rebuilding its institutions and consolidating peace.

This is by no means a simple process. We have many, many examples that demonstrate that the road towards building a strong and effective democratic system is full of twists and turns and, I would add, is at times full of danger. Societies that emerge from prolonged periods of authoritarian rule are inevitably characterized by structural weaknesses. Such weaknesses can best be overcome through the assistance of the international community. At the United Nations, thanks to the pioneering efforts of a number of countries, a process has been set in motion to provide assistance to the new democracies in a systematic way. The Secretary-General's report rightly focuses on certain issues which are crucial to the efforts to strengthen democracy. Among them, allow me to stress the following.

First, there is electoral assistance. Gradually, but steadily, the United Nations is developing an improved system of electoral assistance and monitoring. This is a very complex issue since elections are a critical time in the building of any democratic system. The procedure

through which assistance is provided should be carefully defined so as to avoid even the shadow of a doubt of inappropriate interference. The United Nations system should consider ways and means to further improve this crucial element of its strategy to support the efforts of Governments to promote democracy.

Secondly, we have free and independent media and their role. Needless to say, freedom and pluralism are prerequisites of democracy, and the development of a free and responsible press is essential to effective democratization. Only last week the Third United Nations World Television Forum was held here at Headquarters with a growing participation of media professionals from Europe, America, Japan and the third world. We are glad to see that the initiative taken by Italy three years ago in this field is producing concrete and beneficial results.

I turn next to the mobilization of civil society. The self-organization of the various sectors of society is essential to strengthening the roots of a democratic system. In this regard too the United Nations can play a very constructive role, as demonstrated by the information provided in the Secretary-General's report. Non-governmental organizations can be a powerful instrument to facilitate the democratic growth of a society. I wish to take this opportunity to say that we should all devote more attention to the contribution that non-governmental organizations can make to the United Nations system as a whole. We should devise ways and means to improve their interaction with the Organization.

One essential component of a viable democratic system is the mature political culture of its citizens. This can only be achieved through education. The teaching of democratic values to children is the first essential step in that direction. The work already done by the United Nations system to further the rights of the child is indeed remarkable. As a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, I have personally witnessed this. Only if the rights of the child are promoted and respected can children — our future; the future of our world — grow to become responsible citizens, willing and able to participate in the democratic life of the country.

These are just a few thoughts on one of the most important issues facing the United Nations. Italy fully supports, and has joined in sponsoring, the draft resolution introduced by Her Excellency Ms. Elena Zamfirescu, Secretary of State of Romania, to give new momentum to this issue. We will be working in close cooperation with our Romanian friends, with the other sponsors of the draft resolution, with our partners in the European Union in particular and with all other Member States to improve the capacity of the United Nations system to support the efforts of Governments to promote, consolidate and strengthen new and restored democracies.

Mr. Botnaru (Republic of Moldova) (*interpretation from French*): The changes that have taken place in recent years on the international scene have given fresh impetus to the world-wide process of democratization, although that process is far from complete. My delegation agrees with the ideas stated by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union and associated countries. Moreover, the Republic of Moldova, which since it proclaimed independence seven years ago has been committed to the democratization of society and to building a State based on the rule of law, greatly appreciates the advisory services and technical and financial assistance provided by the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations for programmes in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. My Government is making sustained efforts to implement the Vienna Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, at which I had the honour of leading the delegation of the Republic of Moldova.

Since its independence, my country has made progress towards the democratization of social and political life. All elections have taken place periodically and have been free and fair, including this year's multi-party parliamentary elections. Likewise, the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova guarantees a State based on the rule of law, democratic principles and human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our legislation also protects the right of national minorities to free expression and to the free development of their ethnic, cultural and religious identity.

But the process of democratization in the Republic of Moldova has been affected by the activities in the eastern part of the country of a separatist regime which continues to violate the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Moldovan citizens. My Government's efforts peacefully to resolve the situation in that area have met with the intransigence of the anti-constitutional authorities of that secessionist region. Yet we do not agree that the process of democratization could have fostered the rise of aggressive separatism in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, with its harmful consequences for democratic reform and overall national security.

We continue to believe in the curative powers of democracy. Further, we believe that the stationing of foreign military units on the territory of a country without its consent seriously hinders both the process of democratization of the State on which the troops are stationed and that of the State to which those troops belong. In our view, the unconditional, total withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of the Republic of Moldova would have an inestimable impact on the advancement of democratization throughout the country.

In spite of all the difficulties and the negative effects of the economic and financial crisis, the Government of the Republic of Moldova is determined to continue the process of democratic reform and the transition to a market economy. Democracy as a system of government is inconceivable without sustainable development, and the United Nations has an important role to play to that end.

The focus of the follow-up process to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies was the theme of democracy and development, first at Bucharest and then at New York. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova welcomes the report of the Secretary-General. We encourage support by the United Nations system for Government efforts to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, through innovative methods emphasizing ways in which the United Nations can respond effectively and in an integrated manner to the requests of Member States for assistance in the areas of good governance and democratization. We welcome the decision of the Government of Benin to host the fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.

My delegation reaffirms its support for draft resolution A/53/L.38, which was introduced by the delegation of Romania on behalf of the sponsors. We hope it will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Semakula Kiwanduka (Uganda), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland welcomes the Secretary-General's report in document A/53/554 on the agenda item we are discussing today. My delegation also notes with satisfaction that since the last report was presented, at the Assembly's fifty-second session, the United Nations has taken a considerable step to identify and implement ways and means to enable the Organization to respond effectively to requests from Member States for assistance in the field of democratization through a follow-up mechanism to implement recommendations of the Third International Conference of the New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, held at Bucharest in 1997. In fulfilment of this initiative, we are pleased to note that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has created websites on democratization and governance. We consider this a significant development through which Member States will be able to access and share information on each other's experiences.

An ideal and sound democratic dispensation ensures respect for the dignity of mankind, and there cannot be democracy if human dignity is not respected. In this regard, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Committee monitor the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We further note with satisfaction that the Secretary-General's report takes cognizance of the fact that promotion of public participation and a well-informed public opinion are essential in the process of consolidation of democracy and the maintenance of democratic values. The report further emphasizes that without the participation in and active contribution of citizens to social life, true democracy cannot grow and prosper. In our view, a democratic dispensation built upon this framework holds the key to good governance and sustainable development.

It was with this idea in mind that His Majesty's Government informed the General Assembly two years ago of the establishment of a Constitutional Review Commission charged with the task of reviewing the country's Constitution. The whole Swazi nation is engaged in this vitally important exercise, and substantial progress has been made over the past 24 months. In our view, the end result will truly reflect the will of the people themselves, and we are confident that we will have in place a constitution that will serve the best interests of all Swazis for many generations to come.

Further to our efforts to enhance the rule of law and governance, with the assistance of UNDP we are currently conducting an exercise on the codification of Swazi law and custom. As a nation that deeply believes in cultural values, we believe that the success of any country's political and economic system hinges on the appropriateness of its cultural orientation. Through this exercise a concrete and factual analysis of our customs will be made with a view to sensitizing our people to the

country's laws and customs that govern aspects of our life.

In September this year, we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of regaining our independence. In all these years almighty God has blessed the nation with peace and stability, which has enabled us to develop and prosper in almost all aspects of life according to the wishes and expectations of our people. And as we venture towards the new millennium, our overall aim is to raise the living standards of our people and to ensure that access to all the basic requirements of a decent human life are available to all.

Also this year, the Kingdom of Swaziland witnessed one of the goals of the Bucharest Conference, which the Conference declared to be a democratic right to be observed by all States. I am referring here to the direct participation of the people in voting for a new Government. Such a democratic variable and dispensation was realized when the country conducted the general elections this year, which were a great success.

In order to maintain the stability and prosperity that we have enjoyed over the years, we have embarked on a soul-searching exercise with a number of initiatives aimed at identifying priority areas for action through the involvement of our people themselves. Through such initiatives, we have identified a twin-track approach that encompasses the economic and social reform agenda to cover the short term, and a national development strategy to provide an action plan for the longer term. With these in place, we believe that effective management of our resources, accountability and the transparency of our public sector will be guaranteed.

The creation of an African Centre for Civil Society to serve as a focal point and information centre for activities related to popular participation is yet another major development. We trust that the Centre will truly live up to its expectations and will enable the Economic Commission for Africa to expand its assistance to improving government and civil society relations and promote civil society's role in democracy and good governance.

In conclusion, allow me to state on behalf of my delegation that we have been most grateful for the support we have received from the United Nations and from our partners towards the important nation-building processes we have embarked upon. We value highly the continued support and encouragement from many of our friends and partners. We also look forward to the summit of heads of State of Africa on democracy and governance, which will take place in 1999 in Pretoria, South Africa. We are grateful to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the project of this magnitude that it has initiated towards the promotion and understanding of democratic principles. Counting on the success of the conference held at Maputo, Mozambique in July this year on the challenges of democracy and governorship, we are positive that future projects on this subject will be initiated as part of the follow-up mechanism of the Bucharest Conference.

Allow me to reflect on a novel written by a renowned scholar. The story took place on a certain island in one of the developing continents. At a shipyard where most ships used to come for docking, the citizens of that island time and again used to dance and clap hands whenever foreign ships came for docking. One courageous woman approached some young boys and said, "My boys, why do you always dance when a foreign ship approaches your island?" Another question was: "If you find it necessary to dance for any ship docking, why do you not do your best to build your own ship so that you can dance for your own ship instead of foreign docking ships?".

In this context, I want to warn developing nations that democratization does not by any means mean that we should always import ideas from the developed nations. It is now time that we sit down to map out our own destiny and democratize in a manner that will reflect the homegrown democracies. The democracy that is said to be perfect today was piloted over 1000 years ago and is being imposed upon others now that the experiment was completed — especially upon us in the developing nations, including Africa. Anything that comes from the developing nations is put aside and labelled undemocratic. This is due to our own mistakes.

We always accept experiments from certain quarters of the world instead of mapping out our own destiny. For instance, when I was growing up, I read that civilization started in Africa — in our sister State, Egypt. That is true. But where are these books today? They have been removed and are kept elsewhere simply because they say that civilization started in Africa. They can no longer be found in the libraries. This is a way of discouraging us and of telling us that whatever we start as developing nations cannot be accepted elsewhere.

I therefore challenge my colleagues to represent Africa. The potential for democratization in Africa is very strong — all we need is time. The developed world

should come and learn from us. We have answers to our problems, but others need to be patient. They took over 1,000 years, so we need more than that. But we are indeed engaged in the quest to realize democracy.

Mr. Erdös (Hungary) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation agrees with the statement made on this agenda item by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

The democratization process continues, in spite of the inevitable difficulties, to make headway throughout the world. At this time of globalization, the United Nations must redouble its efforts so that good governance and the rule of law might truly become universal phenomena. However, though we take note of these activities towards democratization, we must acknowledge that problems continue to exist in our countries and elsewhere and that — as I had the opportunity to emphasize last year during the same debate — we are still witnessing oppression in certain parts of the world as well as attempts, be they open or more covert, to undermine democracy.

We welcome the report on new or restored democracies submitted by the Secretary-General, which advocates the continuation of United Nations activities for democratization and the implementation of projects and programmes in that area. This endeavour must be carried out taking into account the wide variety of conditions that prevail in various countries.

The very places chosen for the convening of international conferences on new or restored democracies — from Manila to Managua to Bucharest — attest to the diversity of the parameters to be considered in this regard. Indeed, underlying the global democratization process and above and beyond certain particular features are the universal values and ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. These are fundamental and necessary criteria which constitute the common heritage of all States Members of the United Nations and that all must strictly respect.

We note with satisfaction that machinery has been established to follow up on the outcome of the Third Conference, held in Bucharest. We welcome the major role played by Romania in the follow-up process, whose objective is the implementation of the recommendations of the Bucharest Conference and, of course, preparations for the forthcoming conference. In this connection we also, as other speakers have done, commend the decision of the Government of Benin to organize the Fourth International Conference at Cotonou in the year 2000 — a welcome addition to the series of events aimed at promoting democracy throughout the world.

Hungary is part of the great family of nations that have established or restored their democratic system in the past decade. Recent experience has taught us that the transition to parliamentary democracy and a market economy is definitely not an easy task and cannot be achieved without obstacles and problems. Nevertheless — and let me emphasize this — the benefits and advantages we have reaped from this transition are worth the cost, and Euro-Atlantic integration is the proof of the solidity of our democratic system.

This year once again Hungary co-sponsored draft resolution A/53/L.38, introduced by the Secretary of State of Romania, because, as we said earlier, we are fully aware, now that the bipolar world is no more, of the importance and scope of the efforts to give democratic governance the attention it merits.

Besides the adoption of this draft by consensus, we would like to see the democratization process and popular participation in the management of public affairs further strengthened and hope that they ultimately will extend to all countries of the world.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): For a number of years the Republic of Belarus has been a sponsor of draft resolutions submitted under this agenda item at sessions of the General Assembly, because of the special situation today of countries with transitional economies and the importance of support by the United Nations system for efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. We believe the problems of this group of countries are extremely important and in general should be taken into account because of their specific characteristics.

In the context of the debate on this item, we wish to reaffirm Belarus's commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments pertaining to the protection of political, civil, social and economic rights and freedoms. The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the laws on citizenship, national minorities, freedom of religion and asylum, among others, firmly enshrine the principles of separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, the primacy of generally recognized norms of

international law, while ensuring that national legislation is in keeping with those norms, and respect and protection for basic rights and fundamental freedoms.

Belarus has ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and has recognized the competence of the Human Rights Committee, pursuant to article 41 of the Covenant. Belarus is represented in the Commission on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Citizens of Belarus have equal rights and opportunities to take part in the political and social life of the country regardless of their national or ethnic origins or religion. The Government has made possible the free development of the various religious faiths, which enjoy equal rights. Over the centuries, tolerance and respect for other peoples have been a traditional part of the national consciousness and character of Belarusians. Belarus regards the preservation of this unique religious and ethnic balance as its contribution to safeguarding stability in the entire region.

Belarus sees the significance of international cooperation among countries with new or restored democracies not only in the formation of theoretical international consensus regarding the role of democracy in today's society. We also need to establish the conditions for providing the appropriate generally acceptable machinery for the realization of this consensus in the activities of all States for establishing constructive dialogue and pooling the efforts of all countries, regardless of the model or orientation chosen for social development, including agreed approaches for ensuring democracy, the establishment of a market economy and the promotion of effective and mutually advantageous cooperation among States with varying levels of economic development.

The countries with new or restored democracies can and must play an important role in the establishment of a new global model for security in the world. In this regard, it is important to safeguard appropriate cooperation with the established democracies, which must recognize the complexity, variety and contradictions in the developmental processes of countries with new or restored democracies. In this connection, I wish to thank Benin for offering to host the Fourth International Conference.

Belarus, as in previous years, is a sponsor of the draft resolution on the item under consideration and intends to fully promote the fulfilment of its basic provisions. This is the specific purpose of our proposal to establish a centre for strategic studies for countries with new or restored democracies.

Mr. Mwamba Kapanga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/53/554, on agenda item 33, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies". We greatly appreciate this report, which gives a clear overview of the important stages in the process begun by the United Nations at the request of Member States in response to the needs of Governments wishing to further develop democracy in their respective States. It also offers prospects for helping promote, on the one hand, communication and understanding among new or restored democracies and, on the other, cooperation between new or restored democracies and traditional democracies, to try to share and profit by the progress made by various countries on the path of democratization.

As emphasized in the report, it is true that new or restored democracies, particularly those that have experienced civil war, frequently face an uncertain future. To redress this situation, international assistance has set itself two major objectives: to prevent the recurrence of conflicts and to create the conditions necessary for lasting democratic processes. These objectives are so well aimed and so important that the international community must make even more of a special effort to lend positive assistance to new democracies and must try to reduce the political handicaps caused by the imposition of often subjective conditions or criteria drawn from a socio-economic milieu other than that of the democracies concerned for the restoration of those democracies.

Results do not come overnight, with the wave of a magic wand. They come progressively as a result of a long and slow process that nevertheless allows for realistic optimism about the objectives of such a process. This is a slow process in new democracies because it must be the result of combining and integrating a number of internal and external factors of our societies, which in some cases include the destruction of the fundamental political and legal structures of our pre-colonial societies by colonial societies and shameless post-colonial dictatorships. During the colonial era and during periods of dictatorship, the people were not involved in the management of public affairs. The process is also slow because of its modalities of establishment, based on old models of democracies, the result of more than 200 years of groping and of questioning democratic processes.

Traditional democracies have evolved, but they have not yet completed their task.

While slow, this process prompts optimism, as my delegation has stated, if the programmes devoted to promoting respect for fundamental liberties and rights of the people are included, with a view to accelerating them. My country has set up a State ministry to deal with human rights. One of its missions is to ensure respect for human rights and to spread a political culture based on respect for human rights. Another related mission is to transmit that culture throughout the population with a view to making the citizens, who have been subjected to dictates of their rulers since 1965, the primary holders of public power and the primary guarantors and beneficiaries of the good management of public affairs. This ministry, despite its brief existence and despite the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has played a very important role in protecting the Banyamulengue in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Likasi and wherever they have felt endangered. International humanitarian organizations working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can attest to this, as they have free access to the areas where those people are found.

My Government, concerned about restoring democracy in the country, has based its policy on the recommendations contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is convinced that by setting up appropriate structures to respond to the requirements of the Universal Declaration, it will guarantee the progress of a stable and lasting democracy for its people.

This approach inevitably presupposes the existence of the appropriate instruments to defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of their beneficiaries. It is within this framework that an electoral schedule has been established, a draft constitution has been prepared and submitted to civil society for its appraisal and a free and independent press expressing well-founded and justified opinions has been authorized. These are milestones indispensable to a democratic life and they require considerable financial means.

In this respect, the Government relying only on the means available to it, has spared no effort to restore sound financial management to the State, and it has not hesitated to punish members of the Government found guilty of financial malfeasance. Everything has been done to promote a speedy restoration of democratic values. Our work in this respect would have yielded palpable results if not for the aggression of which my country is a victim at present.

My delegation is speaking under the agenda item entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies" — first of all, to support the work of the international community and, secondly, to demonstrate that my country, being involved in this very process, needs the assistance of the international community, since it was exactly a year and a half ago that we emerged from our war of liberation. My country has seen its impetus in this democratic process thwarted by the aggression perpetrated against it by its neighbours, Rwanda and Uganda, which invaded our territory.

Avoiding renewed conflict in new democracies is one of the aims pursued under the item before us, and this is a major contribution of the United Nations system's assistance to new democracies. What better help could my country expect from the United Nations system in promoting and consolidating democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo other than for it to use its authority to put an end to the conflict and the invasion of my country? The United Nations interventions in the Gulf and in the former Yugoslavia are obvious demonstrations of the international community's shouldering of its responsibilities in the settlement of disputes between Member States.

The invasion of one Member State by two other Member States has been clearly established, because the aggressors have admitted it. This is a violation of the principles defended by the United Nations. My country, as a Member State, not only bears obligations but also enjoys rights, and it asks that its request be honoured because its sovereignty and territorial integrity have been violated by two Member States. If this were done, an end would be put to this aggression, peace would be restored and the process of democratization would continue. The United Nations also would have shown strict compliance with the provisions of the Charter, and by guaranteeing the implementation of those provisions would be supporting the democratization efforts in my country.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to commend the Government of Benin for having agreed to organize the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, and we offer our encouragement in that regard.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.38.

Before we take action on the draft resolution, I would like to announce that, since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and India.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/53/L.38?

Draft resolution A/53/L.38 was adopted (resolution 53/31).

The Acting President: I shall now call on the representative of Cuba, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation joined in the consensus in adopting resolution 53/31. One element of utmost importance to us in studying and assessing this draft resolution was that it endorsed the right of peoples to choose their own economic, political or social system.

Cuba considers that it is solely up to States to have the central role in creating their institutions and domestic political systems, in accordance with their political traditions and national reality. In the same vein, we are of the opinion that States have the sovereign and discretionary power to forge their own political culture as part of the functions they carry out in domestic policy.

The Acting President: We have heard the only speaker in the explanation of vote.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 33?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 30

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/463, A/53/676)

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/52/849, A/52/850, A/52/851 and Corr.1 and Add.1)

I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 30 September 1998 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of September, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland on agenda item 30, "United Nations reform: measures and proposals". Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland on this item?

It was so decided.

Mr. Jele (South Africa): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the member States of the Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 30, "United Nations reform: measures and proposals".

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts and to the members of the Secretariat for preparing the reports regarding particular issues of United Nations reform.

The Joint Coordinating Committee attaches great importance to the consideration of this item. Indeed, the heads of State or Government of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries, during their Summit in Durban, as well as the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 and China, during their meeting in New York in September 1998, recognized the importance of reinforcing the United Nations for the challenges of the new millennium. They stressed the need to keep under close intergovernmental oversight and review the implementation of the decision adopted by the General Assembly in its resolutions 52/12 A and 52/12 B, as well as a continuous assessment of their implications. While implementing those decisions, they also stressed the need to take into account the views expressed by Member States during the process of their consideration, including

those subjects and aspects on which the overwhelming majority coincided in formulating precise and clear guidance.

Against this background, the members of the Joint Coordinating Committee continue to believe that consideration of the item before us should take place through an intergovernmental process. Furthermore, the proposals of the Secretary-General requiring further consideration by the General Assembly should be discussed through an open and transparent procedure which allows all delegations to participate effectively in negotiation and not be subject to any imposed time-frame. To that end, and in view of the importance we all attach to the issues of reform, we are of the view that, in considering issues under the item, we should avoid any conflict of schedule with other meetings in order that we may engage in a focused and substantive deliberation, while ensuring proper illustration and negotiation.

The members of the Joint Coordinating Committee strongly believe that the recommendations contained in document A/53/463 on environment and human settlements, as well as other proposals under this agenda item, must be discussed in this manner in the mechanisms to be decided by the General Assembly. This would provide the required opportunity for all Member States to contribute to the crucial and important task of strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

In conclusion, allow us to reiterate the commitment of the JCC member delegations to participating vigorously and in a constructive manner in the deliberations on issues of United Nations reform.

Mr. Macartney (Canada): On the eve of the new millennium, the United Nations is facing difficult and increasingly complex challenges. Canada appreciates the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to improve the capacity of the United Nations to meet those challenges by ensuring greater coherence and effectiveness in its work.

I would like to concentrate my remarks today on the recommendations of the Secretary-General, contained in his report on the revitalization and strengthening of the work of the United Nations in the environment and human settlements field.

The increasing fragmentation and growing complexity of the international environmental agenda represent one of the most urgent challenges the United Nations has to face. In this context, Canada wishes to express its support for the recommendations of the Secretary-General. These recommendations are pragmatic and constructive. They represent an important step forward in operationalizing the Nairobi Declaration. They provide a valuable road-map for implementing the excellent proposals of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements that was chaired by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Mr. Klaus Toepfer.

In his report, the Secretary-General provides a series of recommendations for action at the Secretariat level. Canada agrees with these recommendations and we support their prompt implementation. Canada also agrees with the recommendations of the Secretary-General for action by intergovernmental bodies and we urge the General Assembly to endorse them.

I would like to comment on some specific recommendations that Canada considers particularly important. One of those is the establishment of an inter-agency environmental management group. There is an obvious need for better coordination of the work of the United Nations in the environment field. We believe that the proposed group, under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of UNEP, will make a positive contribution in this regard. We urge the Secretary-General to proceed quickly to establishing such a group.

The recommendations concerning the strengthening of linkages between environmental conventions and linkages between their secretariats with a view to achieving synergies, encouraging increased operational efficiencies and promoting better coherence of policies and actions are also very important. With respect to these conventions, we agree that UNEP has indeed a substantive supportive role to play, based on its capacities for information, monitoring and assessment. Canada considers that efforts to improve operational efficiencies should be focused on increased cooperation and stronger linkages between secretariats, rather than through co-location.

The recommendation for an annual ministerial-level global environmental forum is also of key importance. Such a forum does not currently exist, and it is strongly needed. It is appropriate that that forum be convened biennially as part of the regular session of UNEP's Governing Council in Nairobi, and that in alternate years

it take the form of a special session of the Governing Council alternating between regions.

In this context, we support the proposal for universal membership in UNEP's Governing Council, as all countries have duties and responsibilities relating to UNEP and the environment. Canada also agrees that a strengthened participation of civil society is needed in UNEP, since Governments alone cannot solve the environmental challenges confronting the global community. The example set by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development should be followed and further developed.

To facilitate this participation, we support the recommendation that future sessions of UNEP's Governing Council be preceded by, or overlap with, substantial meetings of major groups, with an opportunity for round-table meetings with ministers. With reference to the next regular session of the Council, we support the Executive Director's undertaking of wide-ranging consultations with Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, culminating in a two-day environment forum to be held just before and in conjunction with the session of the Council.

Canada also agrees that the work of UNEP and Habitat should be more integrated in administrative terms and take advantage of synergies at the programme level. We welcome the actions that have already been taken by Mr. Toepfer in this regard, and we encourage him to continue his efforts. Canada also agrees that UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations Office at Nairobi should continue to be directed by one senior official in the future.

As pointed out recently by Executive Director Toepfer, "the time has come to recognize the environmental dimension of individual and collective security". In this regard, the recommendations of the Secretary-General represent a constructive contribution to a strengthened role of the United Nations in the environment and human settlement field. We encourage all Member States to lend their support to their prompt implementation.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The ongoing process of the reform of the United Nations is vital to the future of the Organization. The pressure for reform comes from all participants in the United Nations system, but also, and perhaps most significantly, from the changing nature of our world and the challenges that confront it. Due to the various roles and players in the United Nations community, the process of reform has to be undertaken on two tracks: those matters which the Secretary General is empowered to deal with and those which need the approval of Member States. As we move further in the overall process, the issues relating to reform which Member States must approve shall start to occupy our agenda. The Croatian delegation is of the view that Member States should show flexibility and openness in dealing expeditiously with these issues, since they are clearly to the mutual benefit of all.

It is in this spirit that my delegation has approached the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements and its annex, the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. My delegation wishes to compliment Mr. Klaus Toepfer and the other members of the Task Force for a very good, concise report which provides clear reasoning and recommendations.

The overall significance of the roles of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Habitat as the central institutions in their fields within the United Nations system has been generally stated many times, usually in terms of their potential coordinating role. The important panel discussion held in the Second Committee last month relating to coordination and coherence among the major environmental conventions is an example. The strengths of the Task Force's report are its focus upon the identified need for a holistic approach to issues which come under the common heading of sustainable development, and its infusion of suggested practical steps to bring us closer to achieving this, at least within the realm of the two relevant United Nations bodies. In this regard, the proposed greater role of non-governmental organizations is more than welcome.

Turning now to the content of the report, my delegation believes that it faithfully follows the path set down in the Secretary General's seminal report (A/51/950), which sets out the fundamentals of his vision of the reform process. It is also true to the terms of reference of the Task Force. Throughout the 24 concrete recommendations, we note the cross-cutting theme of coordination and coherence. In this regard, my delegation attaches particular importance to those recommendations relating to linkages between the agencies and between the environmental and environment-related conventions. Additionally, the suggested inter-agency environment management group is a timely proposal.

In the view of my delegation, a more integrated approach to United Nations activities in the areas of environment and human settlements should be directed not only towards cost saving, but also more towards greater efficiency and effectiveness in achieving the ends for which the two institutions were established. In this regard, we believe that the general orientation of the work of the Task Force towards finding the best ways to make use of existing structures was an important component. At the same time however, the overall reform process should take into account the fact that the rapid expansion of international environment law will need to be taken into consideration on the issue of future policy coherence and coordination. This will mean building into new environmental treaties and their implementing mechanisms structures that will ensure that they fit neatly into the overall picture, something which has not been sufficiently accounted for in the past. Clearly, international environmental law will continue to encroach more and more upon all segments of society. It is therefore the responsibility of the United Nations to reflect this reality in the process of reform. Perhaps this could be a matter for the proposed annual environment forum.

Just as the catch-all theme for reform in the area of environment and human settlements seems to be coordination and coherence, in the area of time limits on new initiatives it should be accountability and effectiveness. My delegation is of the view that, among other important considerations, the efficiency of the United Nations should be judged by the quality of the output produced by the Organization. Effectiveness should be measured by an evaluation of the results achieved, taking into account the quantity of the resources allocated to the task. In such an equation, an important factor should be the time taken and the value added by treatment of the issue by the United Nations. In coming to this judgement a particular focus should be had upon the inputs of Member States, the Secretariat and other United Nations bodies. The question of sunset provisions should therefore be viewed in the context of the balance between the value that the United Nations process is adding to the treatment of an issue as against the implications for the Organization's budget.

The symbolism that will mark the year 2000 will have added importance for the United Nations. However, we should be careful not to mark the occasion with purely ceremonial events and words that are unsupported by actions. The imminent arrival of the new millennium should be used as a concrete opportunity to take a step back and look at the major issues confronting the Organization and its place in contemporary and future international relations. This should also mean taking stock of the issues before the Organization and making an objective assessment of the effectiveness with which it addresses them. These aspects should be a component part of the proposed Millennium Assembly, since they are matters which are otherwise difficult to deal with in the regular United Nations calendar, and because of the increasing obligations of Member states. In addition, the symbolism of the end of the millennium should serve as a natural deadline for the implementation of as many aspects of reform as can be achieved.

The proposed Millennium Summit should therefore have a concrete special agenda of issues with which to deal. In this regard my delegation looks forward to participating in the preparatory work on the Secretary General's report on the Millennium Assembly's theme "The United Nations in the twenty-first century", which will set the guidelines for the work of the Assembly.

I shall conclude by indicating that my delegation was looking forward to reviewing and commenting upon the report status of implementation of actions described in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), since it is a major topic for discussion under this agenda item. We had hoped that, given the importance of this item, the report would have been made available well in advance of the discussion. Accordingly, we reserve the opportunity to comment upon it in detail on a later occasion.

Mr. Srivastava (India): At the outset, we would like to fully associate ourselves with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the States members of the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China. We actively and constructively participated in the discussions on this agenda item during the last session of the General Assembly and would like to believe that the changes approved will result in real gains in the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations and make it more responsive to the aspirations and hopes of the vast majority of its Members, namely, the developing countries. We therefore congratulate the Secretary-General on his continuing efforts to reform the United Nations, to better equip it to meet the challenges of the next millennium and to have an impact that can be felt on the lives of the citizens of the Governments represented here.

It is of paramount importance that discussions on this agenda item be undertaken in an open-ended, transparent, intergovernmental process, enabling each and every delegation to effectively participate in the decisions that will significantly influence the future course of our Organization. This could be ensured through, *inter alia*, consideration of these items by open-ended ad hoc working groups. Separate working groups may be required for consideration of the proposals relating to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and human settlements and for preparations towards the successful organization of the Millennium Assembly and Summit. It will need to be ensured that the meetings of these working groups do not overlap. At the same time, their meetings should not be in conflict with the schedule of other important meetings, in order to allow all delegations, especially smaller ones, the opportunity of full and effective participation. Other mechanisms for consideration of these items which meet the criteria mentioned could also be explored.

My delegation has carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/53/463. We have noted that some of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General modify considerably the report of the high-level Task Force. Furthermore, some of the proposals of the Secretary-General, including the recommendations for action at the Secretariat level, require further deliberation before they can be implemented. This will make it necessary for us to undertake a thorough exercise of intergovernmental deliberation on this report. While undertaking those consultations, as underlined in the statement of the Joint Coordinating Committee, no artificial time limits should be imposed. Only thus can we ensure that the decisions finally adopted on the revitalization and strengthening of UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements meet with widespread consensus.

My delegation has stated before that as we inexorably move towards the new millennium, we must work towards ensuring the success of the Millennium Assembly and the Summit. In our view, the Millennium Assembly must be well prepared and should identify effective goals for the Organization in the coming millennium while providing the means to achieve them. An obvious goal would be increasing the role of the United Nations in development, including through the promotion of South-South cooperation.

Another issue of concern to the international community that must be dealt with in the context of the Millennium Assembly and the Summit is that of weapons of mass destruction. By the twenty-first century, both the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention will hopefully have received universal or near-universal ratification. Those weapons of mass destruction have been outlawed, but very little progress has been made on the remaining type of weapons of mass destruction — nuclear weapons. The adoption of a nuclear weapons convention by the Millennium Assembly would be the crowning glory of the United Nations in the next millennium. We hope that the international community will rise to this challenge.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate the commitment of my delegation to work in a constructive spirit with all delegations to ensure that the reform and restructuring of the United Nations are not restricted to bureaucratic structures but result in a forward-looking Organization that is responsive to and capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of the developing countries. In this spirit, we will be ready to participate in negotiations on these questions in the mechanisms to be decided in plenary meeting.

Mr. Koech (Kenya): During the fifty-first session, the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly that he would, in consultation with Governments and the heads of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), develop new measures for strengthening and restructuring those two organizations based on General Assembly resolutions 2997 (XXVII) and 32/162.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements. We see it as a good basis for a more integrated approach in the strengthening and restructuring of UNEP and Habitat. The Secretary-General's report is an appropriate starting point for the process, which will take into account the resolutions and decisions of the Governing Council of UNEP and the Commission on Human Settlements. Our deliberations on this item gives us an opportunity to make contributions to this process.

My delegation associates itself fully with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China, which stresses, among other things, the need for open and transparent procedures. However, we would like to highlight some aspects of the report and put emphasis on those areas that are of concern to my delegation.

My delegation supports the recommendation that there is need for the strengthening of the linkage and coordination among the secretariats of environmental conventions and the capability of UNEP in supporting these secretariats. As the global environmental authority, UNEP should play the leading role in the coordination of these secretariats. Furthermore, there is a need for the secretariats of some future conventions to be co-located at UNEP headquarters. It is our hope that the final recommendations will address the needs and aspirations of national Governments.

We also welcome the establishment of the environmental management group, whose goal is to achieve effective coordination and joint action in key areas of environmental and human settlements concerns with a view to minimizing duplication and overlap. The environmental management group should constantly seek the views of Member States and should be guided by the decisions of the UNEP Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements. In order to ensure better coordination and efficiency, the secretariat of the environmental management group should be located at UNEP headquarters.

The General Assembly will recall that, during the Secretary-General's visit to Kenya this year, he upgraded Nairobi, the only United Nations headquarters in the developing world, to the same status as those of Vienna and Geneva. However, the implementation of the Secretary-General's undertaking will require adequate corresponding finances and human resources. My delegation also looks forward to maximum utilization of existing United Nations facilities in Nairobi.

In conclusion, I wish to state that there is a need for continued separate senior management for UNEP and Habitat to facilitate the effective implementation of their programmes in accordance with their mandates. In this regard, we expect that the normal intergovernmental process will be adhered to in addressing this matter.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): I would like to take up the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements in the first part of my statement. Then I will discuss the Millennium Assembly and sunset provisions in the second part of my statement.

Sustainable development is an area in which the United Nations, as an Organization with universal membership, is being asked to play an increasingly important role. My delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss how we can enhance the effectiveness of the activities of the United Nations system in the field of environment and human settlements as part of the overall effort of the Organization to reform itself.

Japan wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements for their reports. It believes that there is an urgent need for improvement in the activities of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and that the recommendations contained in the Task Force's report are generally on target. We would like to commend Mr. Toepfer and other members of the Task Force for their efforts.

As these reports contain wide-ranging recommendations, we should distinguish between those that we should consider and take action on in the General Assembly and those that should be more appropriately discussed in Nairobi, at UNEP or Habitat. Therefore, in this statement, I would like to offer Japan's views on those recommendations which should be addressed here in the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General has divided the recommendations contained in the Task Force's report into two categories: those on which action should be taken at the Secretariat level and those on which action should be taken by intergovernmental bodies. We believe that this division is a sound one. My delegation basically supports the recommendations in the former category. It does, however, wish to request clarification as to their financial implications and will ask for additional information when we discuss these recommendations in greater detail.

With regard to the second category, we believe there are three main issues that should be discussed in the General Assembly: first, the linkages among conventions relating to sustainable development; secondly, establishment of an annual ministerial environmental forum; and, thirdly, making the membership of the Governing Council of UNEP universal.

The first — the linkages among the conventions relating to sustainable development — is an important issue that must be addressed in all its aspects if we are to achieve coordinated implementation of those instruments. The recommendations on this issue in the Task Force's report are moderate and practical, and my country

supports the gradual and incremental approach they represent.

As regards the second — establishment of an annual ministerial environmental forum — considering that we convene the Governing Council of UNEP once every two years and special sessions of the Governing Council in the intervening years, the proposal does not mean the creation of an additional meeting and is therefore acceptable. However, the proposal to hold that forum outside Nairobi every two years, moving from region to region, would certainly impose an additional financial burden on the United Nations and is inconsistent with our agreement in resolution 48/174 to utilize the conference facilities and services in Nairobi to the maximum extent.

I would like now to turn to the third issue, universalization of the UNEP Governing Council. We are not quite sure what benefit would be derived from this proposal. It would also entail significant expenses for both Member States and the Secretariat. And we must be realistic and recognize that for all decision-making bodies, the larger the membership, the lower the level of efficiency.

My Government does not believe that the Governing Council in Nairobi felt strongly about making membership universal. For all these reasons, my delegation regards this proposal as unwarranted.

I would like now to touch upon the reform of Habitat. In its report, the Task Force concentrated on UNEP. However, the reform of Habitat lags far behind that of UNEP. One reason is the absence of a person in charge who can lead that body and who can also spend all his time on its revitalization. We therefore believe that it is important for the Secretary-General to appoint an officer who will direct the day-to-day operations of Habitat as soon as possible. On the other hand, UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations Office in Nairobi should continue to be headed by one person, as the Task Force has recommended.

Now I would like to turn to the second part of my statement and express the views of my Government on the issues of the Millennium Assembly and sunset provisions. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's proposal that the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly should be designated a Millennium Assembly, and hopes that he will commence the preparations necessary to ensure its success. Permit me at this time to offer some basic comments on how that session should be organized.

First, my delegation strongly believes that the Millennium Assembly should be truly substantive, not merely a ceremonial observance. To ensure that it is an action-oriented session, we support the idea of including a high-level segment, the Millennium Summit, to stimulate and guide efforts to render the Organization capable of meeting the challenges of the new era. To better prepare for the Summit, it would be helpful if the Secretary-General submitted to Member States a substantive report on the United Nations in the twenty-first century that identified possible objectives that the Organization should strive to achieve.

Secondly, because Japan believes that we must continue to pursue reform throughout the entire United Nations system as a matter of the highest priority, our preparations for the Millennium Assembly should provide additional impetus to United Nations reform efforts in the political, economic and social and administrative areas.

Turning now to the Secretary-General's proposal of sunset provisions to set specific time limits for mandates, Japan has supported this idea, as it would help to define clear objectives and goals for the activities and structures of the United Nations. It is especially important that the Organization tackle the new challenges that are sure to arise in a rapidly changing world. The perpetuation of activities that have lost their relevance and urgency takes precious resources and energy away from those that are required to address newly emerging and more necessary needs. Without delay, therefore, the General Assembly should adopt a resolution establishing the principle of such a time limit and requesting an appropriate body to consider how such sunset provisions should be applied as one of the useful tools for United Nations programming.

As the Secretary-General said in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), reform is a continuing process, not a single event. And Japan is convinced of the importance of continuing the reform of the United Nations so that it will be more responsive to our needs as we move into the twenty-first century. Let me assure members that Japan intends to participate actively in the negotiations on the issues mentioned in this statement.

Ms. Fjellanger (Norway): Norway has on a number of occasions stressed the need for the renewal and strengthening of the United Nations so it can better meet future challenges and better assist developing countries. Last year at the fifty-second session we were encouraged when the General Assembly supported the reform

programme of the Secretary-General. To maintain the momentum of the reform process we must now focus on implementation of the reform decisions taken and must take the necessary additional steps.

On this occasion I am honoured to address the General Assembly on the need to strengthen the performance of the United Nations with respect to environment and human settlements. As a member of the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, I particularly look forward to an open and constructive debate on these important issues. Implementing measures to strengthen the Organization's performance in this field will have to be a step-by-step process. The issues are complex and interrelated; there needs to be broad agreement on the steps to be taken; and some of the necessary steps may have financial implications which will need to be considered. However, there is no time to lose in getting this process under way and in taking the first concrete steps.

Against this background, the Secretary-General's report on environment and human settlements (A/53/463) is an excellent starting poin. for further action. We encourage action to implement recommendations at the Secretariat level and look forward to the consideration of relevant recommendations in the governing bodies of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). The General Assembly has in particular been invited to consider recommendations that involve the organization of intergovernmental cooperation and the possible coordination of work under the various relevant conventions.

The international community has demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainable development. During the 1990s we have gradually come to a shared understanding of the threats to the human and natural environment. We have negotiated common visions, and we have committed ourselves to implementation. The record is as impressive as it is vast. We have created conventions, protocols, plans of action and sets of recommendations in a number of areas. The time has now come to look at how all these different instruments and programmes can work together and to capitalize on possible synergies in an open and participatory manner. We are here today to set in motion a process of gradually bringing about improved policy coherence and more coordinated action in the fields of environment and human settlements.

It is important to stress that the recommendations proposed have been formulated with a view to avoiding the creation of new entities in the United Nations system, and to respect the mandates, legal status and regulations of all bodies involved in this field. As we review existing structures and arrangements, we must keep in mind the basic functions of the United Nations in the fields of environment and human settlements. At the normative level, the role of the United Nations is to facilitate dialogue and consensus-building at the political, expert and scientific levels and to assist in the development of international law, guidelines and standards.

The United Nations is also entrusted with the important task of following up and implementing the priorities that we as Member States have agreed upon. It is my firm belief that the implementation of the environment and human settlements agendas can be carried out in a forceful and optimal manner only if the normative processes are sufficiently coordinated. The United Nations needs to develop a visible and distinct profile on environmental matters. A more sustainable use of resources will increasingly be a precondition for long-term economic growth and social welfare.

The Secretary-General considers a series of practical measures to help strengthen and consolidate our efforts and achievements. I would especially like to highlight the following points.

First, on the issue of intergovernmental cooperation, we need to look into ways and means of promoting political engagement and accountability and of securing ministerial participation in the international processes of forming opinions and decision-making. I strongly favour the establishment of a global ministerial arena for the environment. We need a global authority and a high-profile meeting arena where ministers can gather to reach a common understanding as a platform for future action. In line with the overall aim of building upon existing structures rather than creating new entities, Norway agrees that such a gathering could be convened while the UNEP Governing Council meets. All participants should have a similar status and an equal say in the decision-making process. The Task Force recommended that these objectives of the ministerial arena could be achieved by making membership in the UNEP Governing Council universal. The meetings could be convened in different regions in alternate years.

Secondly, a special point is made of urging countries to coordinate their national input to different

intergovernmental processes. I believe that this is something that can be greatly facilitated if we take practical steps together to identify and act upon some of the interlinkages that exist between the various conventions. Conferences of the parties should have sufficient awareness of the existence of areas of common concern and overlapping processes. The Task Force proposed that this be accomplished by the introduction of practical and gradual steps to exchange information on a regular and voluntary basis. It was recognized that UNEP would need to upgrade its scientific and information capacity in support of the conventions when invited to assist in this process. UNEP must, in short, focus its role in line with the Nairobi Declaration.

There are significant additional costs and inefficiencies associated with the geographic dispersal of the convention secretariats, and it is recommended that Governments and the conferences of the parties of the various conventions consider these costs and seek to address the situation.

Norway finds the idea of thematic clusters encouraging. We further suggest that debates on the location of future secretariats give due consideration to this. In the long term, the possibility of negotiating umbrella conventions should also be given due consideration.

Thirdly, it is imperative that UNEP manage to draw the interest and attention of civil society to its cause. Scientists, media, the business community and non-governmental organizations are all key players in setting the political agenda. The Task Force proposed that the UNEP Governing Council become more like the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) with respect to interaction with non-governmental organizations and major groups.

As far as relations with the CSD are concerned, the Governing Council is to be convened early in the year so that it can provide input from the environment ministers to the Commission. Since the special session last year, the CSD work programme has become more strategic and integrated in its approach. The main future challenge for the CSD is to strengthen the two other pillars of sustainable development — social and economic development — and to promote the active involvement of environment ministers and other ministers at its sessions.

The report also contains recommendations to improve inter-agency coordination. The proposed environmental management group is a testimony to the cross-sectoral nature of environment management, in that it would encompass all relevant actors and agencies. It is to be primarily an administrative group, although it might, within certain limits and time-frames, propose programmatic elements where relevant. The added value of the environment management group will lie in its ability to identify synergy effects between its members, and the viability of the group over time will lie in its ability to offer input and inspiration. While these issues belong to the category of recommendations to be decided at the Secretariat level, some issues, such as those related to the mandate, function and possible cost implications of the environmental management group should be clarified.

Although there are overlaps between environment and human settlement, it must be recognized that the latter also has a separate set of objectives. Habitat must remain a distinct entity within the larger United Nations family in Nairobi. We strongly support the revitalization of the Habitat Centre and believe that it will facilitate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, adopted at Istanbul in 1996.

We have created a large body of environmental law and policies, and we cannot afford to let institutional and financial inefficiencies get in the way of their full realization and implementation. Norway is strongly committed to the Secretary-General's overall reform process, and we also wish to see a strengthening of the United Nations in the important fields of environment and human settlement.

Finally, I would like to make a few additional comments on some of the issues under this agenda item.

Norway has previously supported arrangements for the Millennium Assembly. This may give Member States an opportunity to discuss and agree upon fundamental policy recommendations and the role of the United Nations in the next century. For this to be successful, there is a need for a true role and a broad-based preparatory process, which should start during the current session of the General Assembly.

With regard to the role of the Trusteeship Council, Norway has yet to be convinced of the need for its reconstitution.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.